

Be Judged

(Matthew 25:31-46) J G White

11 am, Sunday, November 23, 2014; UBC Digby

To judge and be judged is not a popular thing, with few exceptions. *Don't be judgmental* seems like a watchword when it comes to being a Christian, and to making a reputation for a local Church. But we all judge, in certain ways. A cake is in the oven, and we judge *when* it is truly done and can come out. Once it is baked and iced, it might go to an exhibition and be judged – some cakes will win a ribbon. Perhaps because I am a public speaker, I will be called upon in June to judge a Town Crier competition here in Digby.

And, we do judge things we think good or ill about other people's lives.

Is there judgement to get into heaven, based on our behaviour? The Final Judgment?

Or is there grace, reliance upon the sacrifice of Jesus to atone for us? "Nothing in my hand I bring, only to Thy cross I cling."

Ephesians 2:8-9 *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.*

Is it some sort of both/and?

A man dies and goes to heaven. Of course, St. Peter meets him at the pearly gates. St. Peter says, "Here's how it works. You need 100 points to make it into heaven. You tell me all the good things you've done, and I give you a certain number of points for each item, depending on how good it was. When you reach 100 points, you get in."

"Okay," the man says, "I was married to the same woman for 50 years and never cheated on her, even in my heart."

"That's wonderful," says St. Peter, "that's worth 3 points!"

"Three points?" he says. "Well, I attended church all my life and supported its ministry with my tithe and service."

"Terrific!" says St. Peter, "that's certainly worth a point."

"One point? Golly. How about this: I started a soup kitchen

in my city and worked in a shelter for homeless veterans."

"Fantastic, that's good for two more points," he says.

"TWO POINTS!!" the man cries, "At this rate the only way I get into heaven is by the grace of God!"

"Come on in!"

I tend to think in terms of Grace being so important, and often not understood by the human soul. God's amazing grace is in the *gift* of salvation. So I react, often, to phrases that seem to earn people's way to God and heaven.

A few weeks ago in worship we heard the poem: *The Final Inspection*. In terms of theology about getting to heaven, this kind of poetry is not my favourite kind of thinking.

"Step forward now, you soldier,

How shall I deal with you?

Have you always turned the other cheek?

To my Church have you been true?"

The soldier squared his shoulders and said,

"No, Lord, I guess I ain't.

Because those of us who carry guns,

Can't always be a saint. ...

There was a silence all around the throne,

Where the saints had often trod.

As the soldier waited quietly,

For the judgement of his God.

"Step forward now, you soldier,

You've borne your burdens well.

Walk peacefully on Heaven's streets,

You've done your time in Hell."

It seems to be in tune with judging the actions and experiences of this life. In the end, it is sort of grace... but no mention of Jesus. Still earning – already did his “time in hell.” But I should read Jesus's story of the rich man and Lazarus...

Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. Luke 16:25

Today, Matthew 25 – three scenes from Jesus. 1. Kingdom of heaven – like the ten maidens, wise and foolish. 2. It will be like... parable of the talents. 3. “When the Son of Man comes...” The sheep and the goats – the Judgment.

Sounds like judgment of how well one has done in this life.

But, it does say, “the nations,” which will be separated like sheep and goats. So, is this communal judgement? And does the word rendered “nations” really refer to the Gentile nations, those not following the Jewish Messiah, Jesus, the Son of Man?

As we ponder the judgment of a community, we may ask, how shall the Church be judged? The Fellowship of Christ?

Divinity Student reported on a recent class discussion – the Church shall be called to account for residential school abuses, and the like. Hmmm. And there are not just sins of commission, there are sins of omission.

In this fellowship created by God, because of Jesus - the Church – there may be more for us to be and do than we have been doing of late. “For God so loved the world that He did not send a committee,” for instance. And other minor things that we major on, and miss the point.

On Friday Dave VanTassel and I attended a seminar on creating a culture of invitation. 85-90 percent of church people have no intention to invite anyone to join them in a service, small group, etc. Many may want to invite others, but very few intend to invite. There are many fears and barriers.

And in our personal, individual walk with the Lord... do we miss out on so much? Remain shallow? Dallas Willard spoke and wrote extensively on Christian discipleship. Said to the Baptist Convention once, we might not be unsaved, but have to wear a dunce cap for the first thousand years we are in Glory!

Confession and forgiveness in the life of the Church now can be important. How much better to have the Lord deal with us now, than leave it all for later.

Charles Wesley's 'method.' In meetings, small groups for discipleship, several questions could be asked. Four questions were required:

1. What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?
2. What temptations have you met with?
3. How were you delivered?
4. What have you thought, said, or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?

I wonder how transforming and powerful it would be to let God into our lives by sharing our sin and forgiveness like this.

Confess your sins to one another... James 5:16

20th Century theologian and martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, wrote about this, in his book, *Life Together*. (pp. 110-112)

He who is alone with his sin is utterly alone. It may be that Christians, notwithstanding corporate worship, common prayer, and all their fellowship in service, may still be left to their loneliness. The final breakthrough to fellowship does not occur, because, though they have fellowship with one another as believers and as devout people, they do not have fellowship as the undevout, as sinners... So everybody must conceal his sin from himself and from the fellowship. We dare not be sinners.

...Christ made the Church, and in it our brother, a blessing to us. ...Our brother stands before us as the sign of the truth and the grace of God. He have been given to us to help us. He hears the confession of our sins in Christ's stead and he forgives our sins in Christ's name. He keeps the secret of our confession as God keeps it. When I go to my brother to confess, I am going to God. ...So in the Christian community when the call to brotherly confession and forgiveness goes forth it is a call to the great grace of God in the Church.

Sharon and I were in a small group, a spiritual formation group; each time we met we learned to answer these questions:

What temptations have you faced since our last meeting?
How did you respond? What spiritual disciplines has God used

to lead you further into holiness of heart and life?

Could we start to build this into our church life, the conversations and ministries of our ‘church family?’ This kind of ministry is surely here, slightly, under the surface, in some relationships. Could our God deliver and bless us more using this kind of interaction.

Once upon a time in Baptist Churches – maybe even here – there was opportunity for confession, repentance, prayer and support, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Conference Meetings. I read about these in old minutes from a former church of mine. Read in the history of a long-established Baptist Church...

For well over 100 years, it was a time of worship, of soul searching and confession. All those who had knowingly committed any sin, most of which would seem trivial today, were expected to confess, and ask forgiveness, not only from God, but from their fellow members. If such confession was not forth coming and the Church Fathers knew of the misdemeanor, that sinner would be called to give an account of his erring ways. (First Cornwallis United Baptist Church: Celebrating 180 Years of Christian Witness, p. 36)

Having fellowship as sinners, as well as saints, could be a breakthrough in our day and age. And it would not be about being judgmental. It would be about being together before the God who will be our Judge, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is part of our salvation being appropriated and lived out, now.

As we look back at the apocalyptic parable Jesus gives, of the sheep and the goats, we notice the actions present or absent in the lives of “the nations” who are judged. Hungry fed, thirsty given drink, stranger welcomed, naked clothed, sick cared for, and the imprisoned visited. The righteous ones, the sheep, say they did not know when they did that to the King, Jesus. They were living compassionately, but these were not religious acts calculated to be good.

And when the goats also say they did not know that the King, Jesus, was ever in need, this excuse condemns them. Real love is indiscriminate, and does not have to ask *who* is in need. “Is this someone special I *should* help?” It is simply anyone and

everyone in need who is blessed, in God's economy.

Let me conclude with two scripture quotations...

Jesus said, *"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."* (Matthew 7:1-2)

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times." (Matthew 18: 21-22)

Praise God! that we are given the ministry and authority in Christ to forgive others, and not given the power or authority to judge others. Isn't that good news?

Let us pray.